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FREE and SERIOUS
REMONSTRANCE

TO
Protestant Dissenting Ministers;

On Occasion of the
DECAY of RELIGION.

With some Observations on the
Education of Youth for the MINISTRY.

By a LAYMAN.
Nathaniel Neaf son of
Rev'd Daniel Neaf, M.A. K.



LONDON:

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE sole Reason of Printing this Letter, was to procure a Number of Copies to disperse at the easiest Expence. But as it will not be published or sold, so the Author intends to use all possible Caution to prevent any of them falling into the Hands of the Laity, having no Intention but friendly Admonition, not publick Reproach or Censure; and being fully convinced, That he who needlessly exposes the Failings of Ministers, is either no Friend to Religion at all, or a very unwise one.

The Distribution of this Letter is intended to be as general as may be, amongst the Ministers, to prevent any one's thinking himself pointed at.

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Reverend Gentlemen,

I HAVE an unfeigned Esteem and Reverence for your Order, and for You, as far as your Conduct and Behaviour corresponds with the acknowledged Design of its Institution, which I apprehend to be the implanting and cultivating in the Minds of Men, under the Influence of the Divine Spirit, the Principles and Habits of serious practical Religion, according to the perfect Standard of the Christian Revelation.

In this View of the Nature and Importance of your Office, the little Success you have met with of late, has been a Subject of general Complaint amongst us. For it cannot fail being a grievous and distressing Consideration to every pious and thoughtful Christian, who frequents our publick Assemblies, to observe how indifferently most of them are attended; how cold and formal the Worship is of many, who dare not, or chuse not to be absent; and what little Hope remains, That the rising Generation should fill the Seats that their Fathers have left, or are soon likely to leave vacant.

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Various are the Causes to which this melancholy State and Prospect of Things is owing, and various are the Causes to which it has been ascribed in the publick Discourses and Writings of Ministers, and the private Conversation of Christians. And it requires a much greater Sagacity, and more extensive Acquaintance with Persons and Facts, than I lay claim to, to point out exactly in what Proportion all, and each of the Causes assigned, may have contributed to this sad Effect. Every Man, I presume, may see the Case in somewhat a different Light, according to the Situation wherein he is placed, his own Principles, and the Disposition of the People amongst whom his Observations have been made: Though all agree, That the love of Ease and Pleasure, which so universally prevails, has had a leading Influence in enervating the Minds of Men, and unfitting them both for the Duties of Life and Religion.

But it is needful that the particular and more immediate Sources of so great an Evil should be sought for, as well as the general ones, in order to the Application of suitable Remedies. And there is one, or at least what I apprehended to be one, arising from amongst yourselves, which deserves to be traced

traced and examined into with more Care than, as far as I know, has ever yet been done. And as an Attempt of this Nature by one of the Laity may be more likely to draw your Attention, I trust it will not be received with less Temper, than if it had been made by one of your own Brethren.

And the Point I would submit to your Consideration is, Whether the publick Prayers and Instructions of our Religious Assemblies have been of late conducted in such a Manner, as to have had no Influence in abating, or their due Influence in promoting, the Constancy and Zeal wherewith they were wont to be attended. Need I on this Occasion say, that I intend not to advance a Charge against every Minister? The numerous and flourishing Congregations of some, their eminent Services in the Cause of Religion, and their constant Attendance upon, and exemplary Discharge of the Duties of their Function, in the midst of so many declining Churches around them, bear an honourable Testimony in their Favour, which ought to be Matter of Thankfulness to God, and a Reason for holding them in high Esteem and Veneration among the People: And it would be the Occasion of real and lasting Concern to me, if I should incantiously say

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any thing to afflict or discourage one single Minister, who in the Integrity of his Heart, and with humble unwearied Diligence, has been inflexibly pursuing the great Ends of his Ministry, tho' his Endeavours may not have been crowned with the desired Success.

But the Enquiry I humbly beg Leave to make is, Whether the Zeal and Affiduity of Ministers in general, in qualifying themselves for, and in administering the Ordinances of Divine Worship are not considerably abated, as well as the People's Piety and Regularity in attending them? Whether there is not a Lukewarmness, or a careless or negligent, a light or worldly Spirit visible, amongst those who should cherish the sacred Fire of pure and heavenly Devotion in the Hearts of Christians? Whether the Vigilance and Circumspection, the Concern and Ardour of Ministers have arisen in Proportion to the Danger there confessedly is, That the Cause of their great and worthy Master which they have solemnly undertaken to serve and support at any temporal Pains and Hazard, should decline and perish in their Hands? That the People, I mean Professors, and the Posterity of such grow lukewarm and worldly, or apostatize, is admitted: But do Ministers seriously weigh and consider the Causes and

and Occasions of this, the Artifices and Shares that lead to it? Do they study human Nature, the Temper and Taste of the Age, the fashionable Weaknesses or Vices of Men, which are the Inlets and Sources of these Evils *? Or do they rest in general Notions of, or a superficial Acquaintance with these Things, as foreign, or at least of little Moment, to the Purposes of their Institution? Do they labour after a thorough Knowledge of the Grounds and Principles, the Obligations and Importance of Religion, that they may be more able Defenders of it? And carefully watch and regulate their own Tempers and Conduct; that they may appear illustrious Examples of its Power and Influence? To such Ministers as upon a serious Review of their Conduct, are convinced they have herein discharged a good Conscience, (and such I doubt not there are) this Letter has no parti-

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* It is not here supposed Ministers, especially younger ones, should keep a great deal of Company, or engage in publick Diversions, &c. in order to know the World, (according to the common Phrase.) The Knowledge here meant may be gained from modern Books, and a careful Observation of their Acquaintance, the Principles or Practices that lead them to or from Religion; but a good deal of Attention and Thought about this Matter may be necessary, that their Observations may be just.

cular Direction ; but if there are any, who instead of this, look upon the Ministry as a Province, which since they have undertaken, they would chuse to succeed in ; yet what with the Pains of Study, the small Profits and Emoluments it affords, the Ignorance, Prejudices and Captiousness of the People — a Province, wherein it is not prudent to be too anxious for Success. If for these, or such like Reasons, there are any Ministers, (and would to GOD there were none, or that their Number was small !) whose Language or Actions declare, that they look upon the Service of the Sanctuary, though an honourable, yet a heartless and unprofitable Service, and prepare for, and apply to it accordingly : It is of them I beg Audience, whilst this Way of reasoning and acting is plainly and seriously discussed.

You will readily allow me, That the Christian Ministry is the stated and ordinary Means of beginning and carrying on the Work of Religion in the Hearts and Consciences of Men, and that it is a Means wisely adapted to answer this End ; That it does not derive its Power and Efficacy merely from the Sovereign Will and Authority of GOD, but has a natural or moral Fitness for this Purpose, as Education has an Aptitude for opening and improving the Minds of Youth, or Exercise

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for increasing their bodily Strength and Vi-
gour. Now as every Method of Education
does not alike answer its professed Design,
sometimes thro' want of Skill or Diligence in
the Tutor, as well as often thro' a want of
Capacity or Attention in the Learners; so
every Method of Preaching may not be alike
conducive to promote the important Ends of
it, either thro' want of Fidelity, or Skill,
or Application in Ministers, as well as for
want of Attention, and a right Disposition
in the People.

I am willing to make any reasonable Con-
cessions concerning the Ignorance and Indis-
position of Mankind in all Affairs of a reli-
gious and spiritual Nature. And that amongst
those who have their serious Hours and In-
tervals, nay of truly sincere and upright
Hearts towards God, there are often great
Remains of evil Habits, too much Indulgence
of favourite Failings, and strong Inclinations
to lay a Stress on Things that come short of a
sincere Devotedness to God, and a steady
persevering Endeavour after a greater Confor-
mity to him; some in Modes of thinking and
believing about high and abstruse Points of
Doctrine; others, in the occasional Working
of devout Affections; some, in the regular
Performance of the instrumental Duties of

Religion ; others again, in a strict Regard to social Virtues, to the comparative Neglect of those Branches of Religion, that are of equal or higher Importance. And that these different Apprehensions and remaining Imperfections amongst Christians, are often the Source of real and numerous Difficulties and Discouragements in the Ministerial Life. But what follows from hence, except it be, that the Spirit of Christianity is totally departed from us, and all Attempts to recall or reviye it, are fruitless and vain ? Or that more Study and Labour, Wisdom and Watchfulness, is needful in Ministers than ever, to find out the Cure of these Disorders, and to eradicate the Seeds and Principles of them, or at least, to check their Progress, and by seizing the most favourable Opportunities to administer suitable Remedies for recovering us to a State of more perfect Soundness and Stability in Religion ? Are Danger and Difficulty any Pleas for Indolence and Inactivity in any other Case of Moment and Importance ? And what then can justify the suffering the most glorious Cause that was ever pleaded before the World, to be lost in your Hands, short of an Appeal to the Heart-searching GOD, that it was impossible for you to have laboured

boured with more intense and unweari'd En-
deavours to defend and preserve it?

Let us therefore enquire, what may and ought to be done by Ministers, in the Case under Consideration. And here I beg Leave to say, it appears to me, they ought to be well acquainted with the Science they profess, I mean Religion in general, and in every View of it; and with Mankind, whom they are to gain over to the Belief and Practice of Religion. If they understand not the former, they dishonour themselves or their Profession, must be incapable of explaining to others what they do not thoroughly understand, of inforsing on others what they do not feel the Force of themselves; of defending a Cause, if they are not Masters of its Strength; and of the Sophistry and Weakness of the Cavils and Objections against it. And all this may be done, tho' perhaps not so easily as is generally imagined. To instance in the Knowledge of the inspired Writings, (a most essential Branch of Knowledge for a Minister;) It is not the having read over the Bible, perhaps once or twice, in the original Languages, and compared it with one or two Commentators, and having attained to some general Satisfaction as to the Meaning of most Texts, even those that

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are controverted, to rest contented in such Attainments. But it is the being daily-conversant with them, as a stated and most delightful Exercise; it is the studiously searching into, or continually ruminating on them, either to enter more thoroughly into their Meaning and Spirit, or discover their Truth and Perfection, for the confirming their own Faith, or convincing Gainsayers, or enlightening ignorant Minds, or in order to extract some pious and wise Meditations, that may animate and refresh the weak and weary, or administer Satisfaction and Joy to the vigorous and improving Christian? in which Employment the Assistance of any good Authors for explaining or illustrating Passages of Scripture, is not to be disdained or neglected; nor that of the best, implicitly trusted to, or rested in. I say, it is such a steady Conduct as this, that can alone qualify a Man for the Character of being *mighty in the Scriptures*, a *Workman that needs not be ashamed*. The Knowledge of Scripture that might be very sufficient for a common Christian, is by no means sufficient for a Minister; and the Knowledge that may be very competent for a young Minister at the first Entrance on his Office, may be very unworthy

worthy a Minister of longer standing, and more advanced Years.

Next to a thorough Acquaintance with the Science professed, nothing is more needful than a Knowledge of Mankind, who are to be taught it ; particularly, the Genius and Temper of the Age, and the prevailing wrong Opinions and Pursuits, that render Men averse to the Belief and Practice of Religion ; what Arguments or Arts are most instrumental to these, and by what Means and Degrees they make their Way into, and get Possession of the Hearts of Men. And in order to strip off their false Disguise, and abate their Influence, great Discernment is often requisite : What would have been very pertinently and sufficiently said in one Period of Time, may carry little Conviction at another ; because the Age may have degenerated further into Infidelity or Scepticism, or a Disregard to Principles that used to be admitted. And if that is the Case, Ministers must go back in their Reasonings, and begin to build from the Place to which others have pulled down, if they would erect a stable and lasting Structure. And this must be submitted to with Condescension and Temper towards prevailing Weakness and Corruption, not with Peevishness or Reproaches ; distinguishing

guishing carefully, how far this is owing to innocent or culpable Prejudices, to mere Inadvertency and Indiscretion on the one Hand, or to a corrupt and vicious Temper on the other ; because great Difference should be used in applying to Persons or Parties under such different Circumstances ; otherwise much Harm may be done to Religion, where the greatest Good is intended.

At the same Time no particular Points or Persons must be so attended to in the Course of a Ministry, as to occasion the Neglect of others. Few Subjects, if well handled, will afford proper Instruction and Entertainment to Persons of very different Characters and Attainments ; and the State and Circumstances of an Audience should be carefully considered, that while some are particularly provided for, none may complain of being disregarded.

Neither is this all ; for much Heed should be taken to the Manner in which Things are said, as well as to the Things themselves, if Ministers are truly desirous of being useful. Every one must be sensible, that the gaining the Attention of an Audience is a most necessary and essential Point ; and nothing is more likely to do this, than the discovering a high Respect and Regard for them,

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by the Manner in which they aread dressed ; Or more likely to prevent it, than appearing in the Pulpit with Airs of Self-sufficiency, or great Superiority, or of seeming Indifference and Unconcern. Ministers must reverence the People, if they would have the People reverence them ; must appear in earnest themselves, if they would have others really be so ; must deliver nothing but what has been maturely considered and digested, if they expect it should meet with Regard: Endeavouring that nothing may be said, that is unintelligible to the meanest, or contemptible to the more judicious. For if they seem to despise or slight us, we shall soon despise them. If they provide a mean and ordinary Entertainment for us, when we expect to be refreshed and delighted, we shall go away with Dissatisfaction or Disgust, and have little Inclination to attend them again, when perhaps they might design to entertain us better. It is not the Subject of which they treat, (that lies open to us as well as to them) but the Manner in which they treat it, upon which Preachers should depend for their Acceptance. If they generally handle them worse than what has been done already, in Books that we have at home, and may consult at our Leisure, we shall have little Heart to go abroad, merely to pay a

Compliment to them. It is unquestionably a just Observation, tho' a very melancholy one, That the more polite and refined Part of Mankind are frequently most apt to neglect, and even despise, the publick Ordinances of Religion ; and yet there is nothing in those Ordinances themselves unworthy the truest Politeness, or the highest Refinements of the human Understanding : Would to GOD there had been nothing more liable to give Offence, in the Conduct and Manner of those who have administered them !

But here some will be ready to say, Success does not depend on our Endeavours, but on GOD. And I am ready to grant it. But if this be said to excuse the Ignorance or Sloth of Ministers in their Work, it is a shameful Abuse of the Divine Goodness, because they know, that God Almighty will ordinarily bless and succeed the likeliest Means, and most strenuous Endeavours for advancing his own Honour, and the Kingdom of his Son. And those who seek so vain a Refuge as this, from the Reproaches of their own Mind, or of the Christian World, on Account of their Neglect of the Souls of Men, are, I fear, hardly so sincere and importunate, even for the Divine Blessing, as they ought ; nor is it possible they should

should be so, if they understand the Terms, on which alone it can be reasonably asked or expected.

But besides these, I am sensible there are many worthy Men, who may be ready to say, The Apostles and first Ministers of Christ, and even those in later Days, who have been most highly owned and honoured in the Service of the Gospel, have used great Plainness of Speech, and carefully avoided the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom. And I allow that with Respect to the former, who were to preach a new Doctrine, in Connection with certain Matters of Fact, of which they were Witnesses, and the Truth of which was to be supported by their Veracity, and the miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost conferred on them; nothing could have been more absurd or hurtful to their Design, than to have used any Methods that might shew them to be Men of Art and Subtlety; for which Reason our Lord in his Life-time, manifestly chose out the plainest and most illiterate Persons for his Apostles. And I also acknowledge, that even now, All refined Speculations, or nice and curious Disquisitions, or false and sophistical, or even dry or intricate Reasonings, or lofty Flights and Strains of Rhetorick, or high swelling

Words, that are above the Capacities and Reach of a common Audience, are unworthy the Solemnity and Importance of the Pulpit, But surely it cannot be, that plain and solid Reasoning upon the great Doctrines and Duties of Religion, revealed in the Scriptures, to confirm their Truth and Obligation, or display their Excellence, and manly pathetick Address, to impress them on the Consciences of Men, are unsuitable to the primitive and most excellent Patterns and Models: I say, surely this cannot be meant by those who are acquainted with the strong Reasonings of St. *Paul*, or who have heard of the Eloquence of *Apollos*, or who have ever felt in their Hearts any such warm and pious Breathings as the lively and animated Devotions of good King *David*, are fitted to excite: Nor can I apprehend, that any judicious Christians imagine, that an extempore unpremeditated Harangue, upon any Subject of Faith and Practice, is likely, generally speaking, to be so pertinent, convincing, and useful, as a well-studied regular Composition, that has been carefully committed to Memory or Writing; much less that a topical common-place Way of Preaching, or a loose and incoherent Discourse, in which the Text is presently dismissed, if it be at all rightly explained, or

in which the Sound of it only is retained instead of the Sense, as what is least likely to cramp the Preacher in his intended Enlargement; I say, surely no one can imagine, that such Preaching as this, is more likely to meet with the Divine Acceptance and Blessing, than a laboured judicious Discourse, which has been carefully studied and prayed over, before it is introduced into Publick.

I acknowledge, that the Men of fertile Invention, and of sprightly and beautiful Imaginations, who are hardly ever at a Loss for a Flow of apt and pertinent Thoughts and Expressions on any Subject or Occasion, have great Advantages over others; but few are endowed with such Talents: And it is a vain Affectation in those who have them not, to act as if they had; and Persons of flower Apprehensions and Utterance, are often sufficiently recompenced for the Want of these, in the Strength and Solidity of their Judgments; and at the same Time may be able to deliver what they have before prepared, with all the Life and Spirit that is necessary to constitute very acceptable and agreeable Speakers, provided Care be taken by them to be fully Masters of what they have prepared, otherwise the Delivery will be slow and unanimated; and such sluggish Preachers must

must not wonder, if their Hearers are as dull and lifeless as themselves.

It cannot however be denied, that there have been Instances of very uncouth and awkward; very strange and rambling Preachers, who have had considerable Success. But then it has been either in Times, when Accuracy and Correctness were not so much regarded, as they are at present; Or amongst the more illiterate and unpolished People; or else in Circumstances, when the Providence of GOD has made the Minister's Work comparatively easy: Seasons of Persecution, or publick Calamity, when one alarming and awakening Stroke has followed another, and all Prospect of temporal Felicity seemed to be cut off. In such Junctures (unless a People are ripe for Destruction) the Consciences of Men are soft and tender; all Eyes are directed towards Heaven, and whoever comes with a Message from thence, under whatever personal Disadvantages, is sure of a gracious Reception; though there is seldom, on such Occasions, wanting in the Preacher, an Earnestness inspired by the Times, that carries in it irresistible Eloquence. But when the Clouds break away, and Days of Calmness and Serenity succeed, serious Impressions wear off again, worldly Business

or

or Pleasure regain their former Ascendancy, and religious Thoughts and Meditations are treated as unwelcome Guests or Intruders; and unless firm and solid Foundations have been laid, it is well if the main Pillars and Supports of Religion are not shaken. And now the Minister's Work grows every Day more difficult: The Tide of worldly Enjoyments overwhelms the scattered Seeds of Piety and Virtue; and it requires consummate Wisdom and indefatigable Vigilance in Ministers, to maintain their Ground, and to prevent a Deluge of Corruption from prevailing over the moral World.

And such, Sirs, I take to have been the State of this Nation for many past Years; which brings me to the next Enquiry, Whether Ministers have done what was expedient, and might justly be expected from them, to preserve the Interest and promote the Practice of true Religion and Goodness among Men. And here I have little to offer, but in a Way of free and friendly Expostulation, from the View that has been before taken of their Duty.

Have Ministers then aimed, and does it plainly appear that the generality of them are aiming after the highest Attainments in Christian Knowledge and Grace, as essential

tial to, and the proper and highest Ornaments of their Character? May it be discerned in their Preaching and Conversation, that they are really as much superior to others in these Respects, as it is natural to expect Men should be in their chosen Profession, to which they have solemnly devoted themselves, without Limit or Reserve? Are they continually and intensely devising the most likely Methods of spreading the Savour of Divine Knowledge and Grace in the World? Contriving how Opportunities of Usefulness may be gained and improved? And labouring to furnish themselves with all necessary Accomplishments, both internal and external, that may be likely to promote these Ends; chearfully foregoing every Pursuit and Pleasure, that might prevent or hinder them in the more perfect Attainments of such Accomplishments, and leaving no Places with Regret, but their Study and the House of GOD? Do they keep their Minds, as much as may be, disentangled from every inferior and worldly Concern, that they may not be restrained or clogged in exerting their best and entire Powers in the proper Duties of their Function? Does it appear, when they are engaged in sacred Service, that they are most in their Element, and that they have the truest

trueſt Enjoyment of themſelves, when they are called to conſtant and laborious Employment? In a Word, are they as active and diligent in the Prosecution of their Work in all its Branches, as wise and prudent Men are in their worldly Buſineſſ, which Miſtiers ſo often tell us, is comparatiſely of trifling Importance?

Or have there been, and are there no Miſtiers, or very few, who may be ſuppoſed to have reaſoned thus; That (beinſ ordained to their Office, and perhaps caſted to a Church) they have, in the main, got as muſh Knowledge in their Profefſion, as is abſolutely neceſſary, and that the reſt will come gra-dually by Age and Experience, and the ſta-ted Exercise of their Function; that their Buſineſſ is to preach the great Doctrines of the Gopſel, which they think they fuliy un-derſtand, to inform People of their Duty, and exhort them to it, in as good a Manner as the generality of other Preachers do, and by that Means endeavour to make ſome Ad-ditions to their own Churches, or at leaſt to prevent their Numbers and Subſcriptions from leſſening: But that if the good Things that have been already ſaid upon moſt Subjects, will not be attended to and regarded from them, it is imposſible to be always deſiſing

new Things; the Truths of the Gospel are invariably the same, and they must leave the Issue of their Ministry with God; to labour with too much Sollicitude and Anxiety for greater Success, under such a Variety of Difficulties and Discouragements, as they continually meet with, would probably answer no other End, but to render their own Lives uncomfortable, and deprive their Families, before the Time, of the small Support their Labours afford them. For their Parts, they are for preaching the Gospel in a plain Way; if People must be served with Dainties, and entertained with Novelties, there is little Hope of pleasing them; they want the Gospel to be moulded to their Taste and Humour, and to flatter the good Opinion they have of themselves; Whereas the truly Good and Pious make no Complaints of their Performances; and it is the Love of sinful Pleasures and Indulgencies, that prevents others from being satisfied too. Their Brethren in the Ministry have nothing to object to them, the best of their own Congregations highly honour and esteem them; and it is the Subject of their daily Prayer, that the Gospel might be more glorified, and the Church of Christ enlarged.

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In pretty close Connection with such a Way of Reasoning, I take to be the following Method of acting. When Ministers spend a considerable Part of their Time in reading Books of any Kind, that have not a direct Tendency to qualify them for the better Discharge of their ministerial Work ; other Part, in enquiring after News, or at some Meetings of their Brethren, or in trifling and tedious, or frequent Visits at Houses, where they are well esteemed and entertained, and where some in the Family are generally at leisure for Conversation, and want to be amused by the Company of a Friend ; instead of visiting the Ignorant for their Instruction, or the Poor and the Sick, to pray with and comfort them, and to speak a Word in season to them ; and using any Arts almost, to keep up their Interest with the People, rather than the laborious ones, of close and diligent Study, in preparing for the Service of the Sanctuary : However, before the Week is quite expired, a Morning or two must be spent in preparing for the ensuing Sabbath, unless the Minister happens to be indisposed for his Study, or has been a Preacher a great Number of Years, and then less Time may serve ; or it may be as well to make free with an old Sermon. But if a

new one is made, the Sum total of the Preacher's Aim, is to fill up the Hour, as usual, in what he thinks a tolerable Manner, and so as not to repeat any thing that has lately been delivered, nor if possible, to disgust any of his People; and by Habit and Custom, he persuades himself, this is all that can be reasonably expected from him *. And accordingly, he enters the Pulpit fully satisfied with the Sufficiency of his own Preparations, which, by those who come out of a Regard for Divine Institutions, and well disposed to relish any plain and serious Truths, have a Chance to be well received; but as to those, who come for Form or Custom sake, or thro' Constraint of parental Authority, or with worldly Views, they go away as thoughtless and unconcerned as they came, having heard nothing but what they had often heard before in vain, and having met nothing in the Manner a whit more striking or impressive. And thus Ministers and People

* I would not be understood here to censure or condemn the taking a Day's Diversion, or preaching an old Sermon, or Family Visits, or Meetings of Ministers occasionally, and in their proper Season; but stated or frequent Indulgences or Avocations of any Kind, to the Neglect of close and constant Study, and other ministerial Offices; unless when the Infirmities of Age, or bodily Indisposition render such Neglect unavoidable.

ple go on in a dull Round of religious Exercises, till the former's growing Infirmities, and the latter's growing Indifference, or Dislike, reduce our Congregations to nothing. Or if the Preacher finds greater Acceptance, it is chiefly among the weaker Part of his Audience, with whom some Solemnity of Manner, or affecting Tone of Voice, however improper, or over-done, makes an Impression, whilst it gives Offence to the more judicious ; and whilst the rising Generation, whose Imaginations are gay, and whose Passions are strong, for Want of being better instructed and confirmed in Religion, are left a Prey to the Subtlety or Raillery of Infidels and Libertines, and the Allurements of unlawful Gain and Pleasure.

Or supposing the Week to be spent in a better Manner than what has been represented ; Is not the Prosecution of some favourite Study, or the Acquisition of some particular Branch of critical Learning more attended to, than the principal Duties of the ministerial Character ? The Preacher, perhaps, thinks it sufficient, that he prepares a solid and substantial Discourse ; but as to the Arts of popular Address, they are not natural to him ; it is too late in Life, to set about acquiring them now ; or, perhaps, he esteems them beneath

beneath the Aim of a great and noble Mind; not considering, that tho' they are so, when gained by Methods that are inconsistent with a sincere and prevailing Love of Truth and Goodness, or when sought after for base or unworthy Ends; yet that the Forms of polite and elegant Diction, and graceful Deportment in the Pulpit, as far as they are made subservient to the Interests of Truth and Piety, are well worthy the most earnest Sollicitude, and strenuous Endeavour of Ministers. Nay, that some Degrees of them are almost essential to the Character of those, who in such an Age as this, undertake to instruct and persuade Numbers. And a very slight and superficial Knowledge of the World might be sufficient to convince us of the Importance of these Qualifications. Nothing being more obvious than that such Ministers are held in highest Esteem amongst the People, have the most numerous Auditories, and the fairest Opportunities of Usefulness, who possess them in the largest Degrees, tho' their Furniture and other Abilities, may perhaps, be greatly inferior to many of their Brethren.

But it may be objected, that to come up to the Rules that have been before laid down, requires great natural Advantages, a fine Education,

cation, and being early trained to Habits of reasoning justly, and speaking properly in Publick. And I am ready to confess these Things are not sufficiently attended to in early Life, and that our Dissent from the national Establishment deprives our Ministers of some Assurances which theirs enjoy; but I must still beg Leave to ask, Whether Ministers in general are as sensible of, and as diligent to supply their Defects, and overcome their early Disadvantages, as they should be, and are willing to submit to that Course of Self-denial and Pains, that may be needful in many Cases, to subdue wrong Habits, and superinduce right ones? Are they convinced, that it is their indispensable Duty and Interest to labour after higher Attainments in these Respects? Is it manifest, they gain Ground in good Habits of composing and speaking, by Use and Practice, which in other Cases we allow to be a second Nature, and capable of overcoming the greatest natural Impediments? Or rather, do they not sometimes contract worse Habits than what at first they set out with, for want of Attention and Care; or not having found the Success, wherewith their blooming Hopes flattered them, relax rather than increase their former Vigour, and grow

grow faint and weary in the Service? Or if they have found Success, beyond most of their Brethren, presume too much on their present Reputation, not remembering, that the same Means that gained it, are needful to preserve it; that he is a weak Man, who depends on being esteemed To-morrow for the Deeds of Yesterday; and that in Proportion to their past Success, are their Obligations to future Constancy and Diligence.

It is a melancholy Consideration, That the Aim of Ministers in the general, is set so low, as it appears to be in the ordinary Exercise of their Ministry; that the gaining from one another's Congregations, and the keeping some of the Youth that have been religiously educated amongst us, seem to be the highest of their Expectations: If a Number of Strangers unexpectedly come into our Assemblies, especially if any of them are supposed to be Enemies to, or Scoffers at Religion, instead of rejoicing in the Opportunity, (as it would be natural to do, if they were conscious their Performance was above Contempt, and suited to carry Conviction into the Minds of artful Seducers or hardened Sinners) they are rather confounded; or even if one of their Brethren in the Ministry, or a Person, whose Judgment they

they esteem superior to the ordinary Set of their Hearers, however candid, drops in upon them occasionally, it is well if they are not conscious to themselves, that their Sermon stands in need of an Apology. And tho' this might be excusable in a very young Minister, yet it is unbecoming a Minister of any considerable standing and Experience.

And now, if there be any Truth in this Representation, that has been made of the Conduct of our Ministers *, Have not we of the Laity Reason to conclude, that degenerate as we are, a great deal of that Degeneracy, and of the desolate Appearance of the House of God, is owing to the criminal Neglect of such Ministers, who content themselves with passing Sentence against the Age, as hating Instruction, and refusing to be reclaimed ; and with offering up a few languid and customary Prayers to God, that he would pour out a better Spirit amongst us, and take the ~~Work~~ of Reformation into his own Hands ; instead of exerting their own natural Abilities, sunk into Ease and Indolence, that they may become Masters of all the Powers of strong and forcible Reasoning, the

E Charms

* It cannot be supposed, that the whole of this Representation should suit any one Minister; but I doubt some Part or other of it is applicable to many.

Charms of sweet and constraining Eloquence, and the Arts of soft and captivating Address, which can alone restore them to their true Dignity of Character, and just Dominion over the People, and hold us in the most pleasing and awful Attention to the Doctrines they teach, and the Duties they recommend ?

And I confess, it has often struck me with Amazement, how Men in whom one would expect the highest Reverence and Love of GOD, and Zeal for his Honour, can allow themselves statedly, it may be, for a Course of Years, in solemn Acts of religious Worship in the Hearing of a Number of People, to deplore the Departure of the Spirit of GOD from the Ordinances of his House, as the great Cause of their Want of Success in the ministerial Work, when at the same Time, they must be conscious, that if no more Time was spent, or Diligence used in the Affairs of this World, by those who have Families to maintain, than they spend and use in the Work of the Ministry, the Consequence would be inevitable Poverty and Ruin, without their having any Ground to complain of the Frowns of Providence, as the Occasion of their Misfortunes. What Notion then can the Hearers of such Men frame of their Sincerity ! Or what Conduct can

can be more highly provoking to the Divine Spirit, than to charge that Neglect on him, which is chargeable only on themselves?

Would to GOD, that Ministers would seriously consider these Things, and lay them to Heart! For tho' many are the dangerous Symptoms that are upon us, as a professing People, yet none appears to me more threatening than this; as GOD Almighty cannot take a more effectual Way for our utter Destruction, than by permitting those, who should be the *Lights of the World* and *Salt of the Earth*, to lose their Light and Savour, that is, to be insufficient for the great Purposes for which they were appointed; until at Length, they became vile and contemptible, and are trodden under Foot of Men.

It may be necessary to acknowledge, that my Observations have been confined chiefly to publick Preaching, whereas our publick Prayers are a very material Part of the Service, and were mentioned as such in the Beginning of this Address, but a very little Judgment may be sufficient to shew, that most of the Remarks that have been made, are equally applicable to the latter, as to the former, though Words have not been every where used, equally expressive of both: And

I am fully sensible, nothing is more desirable in a Minister, than being able to pray with Propriety, Copiousness, and Freedom, in order to his Acceptance and Usefulness in Publick.

And now, Sirs, notwithstanding all that has been said, I think it but a Piece of Justice both to Religion and to You, to declare, that whatever Failings there may be amongst Ministers, we of the Laity are inexcusable before GOD, if we indulge ourselves in any Neglects of his Service, under a Pretence of Neglects in You. We have the Scriptures in our Hands, and there are yet to be found Ministers amongst us, whose Prayers and Discourses we may attend upon with Improvement and Delight. GOD forbid, that either Ministers or People should be so perverse, as to make our mutual Failings, which ought to be our common Grief, the Occasion of hardening each other, instead of quickening us to greater Circumspection and Diligence !

Before I conclude this Address, give me Leave to apply myself, in a particular Manner to such Ministers, as are any Ways concerned in the Education of Youth for the Ministry : It appearing to me, that either the Nature and Importance of the Trust itself,

self, or the Methods of executing it, have not been so carefully considered or attended to, as they ought, either with Respect to the Choice of the Youth themselves, or their Education afterwards.

In Respect of the Choice of the Youth, for this arduous and important Service, two Qualifications seem absolutely requisite.

A natural Capacity for Literature, and for speaking handsomely in Publick. And

A true Seriousness of Spirit, and Desire of the Ministry for right Ends.

The Necessity of these Qualifications is so obvious, that I think nothing needs be said to evince it. But I am aware of two Excuses that have been urged for the frequent Want of the former.

1. That there are many Places in the Country, where Men of shallow Capacities and low Attainments may be useful; and that it is of as much Importance to provide for these, as for Places of more Politeness.

I answer, Would not Men of superior Talents and Furniture, in all human Probability, be capable of greater Usefulness, even in the meanest Congregations? Do we not find the Gentlemen of Education and Fortune in the Neighbourhood of such Congregations, on this Account, generally attend the

the Worship of the established Church, or refrain from attending publick Worship at all ; Who might (if the Case were otherwise) be the Support and Encouragement of such poor Congregations, and ease the City of *London* of a very great Burden ? True Learning under the Direction of a good Understanding, and undissembled Piety, qualifies a Man to be equally useful and amiable amongst the Poor and the Rich. Besides, this Objection comes too soon, till we are overstocked with Men of eminent Parts and Furniture, for the principal Places in the Kingdom.

And if the greatest Care were taken to fix on no Youths, for such an Education, besides those of promising Parts and Genius, I doubt there might be still such a Failure of Expectation, as to some of them, as would abundantly supply the meanest Places in the Country. But,

2. The greater Objection is, that such Youth are difficult to be found. And I am able to give no Answer to this, except, That no Pains are too great to be taken, by those who are engaged in this Trust, to find them ; and that, I fear, very little have been taken. Ministers, who have the Disposal of publick or private Exhibitions, too readily fall

fall in with the Solicitations of Parents, who want a Provision for a Child, otherwise perhaps, quite destitute of a Prospect of being introduced into Life, in a Character higher than that of a Servant, or a low Mechanick: Or depend on the partial Character of Friends or Parents, by no means sufficient Judges, if they were not partial, of the Child's Qualifications for such an Education; too little considering, that *that* Exhibition is worse than lost, which is applied to educate a weak and incompetent Youth, for so important a Charge, as that of the Souls of Men, especially in a Day of growing Infidelity and Lukewarmness in Religion.

But this is not all; when Care has been taken in their Choice, allow me to say, the following Rules seem deserving of more Regard, than what they have generally met with.

i. That such Youth be made fully sensible, that all that can be done for them at the Academy, to qualify them for their Work, tho' Tutors and Students be ever so expert and diligent during the Time allotted for that Purpose, is to give them such a general Acquaintance with Languages, Systems, and Sciences, as to lay a Foundation for their After-improvements in true and substantial

substantial Learning and Knowledge, both human and Divine ; the Attainment of which, is to go Hand in Hand with the Discharge of their ministerial Work, and to be the constant Aim and Pursuit of their whole Lives : Whereas, I doubt, they are too apt to imagine themselves compleatly equipped for the Service, when they have passed their Trials, and have received a Testimonial of their Qualifications, to enter upon the Work of the Ministry.

2. That their designed Office of publick Speakers, and Pleaders for Religion, be constantly kept in View, from the Time of their being introduced into the Academy, till their Removal from it ; and such Exercises appointed them, as may be most likely to form them to a Readiness of reasoning clearly, and pronouncing properly and acceptably, upon any Subject or Occasion ; and their Proficiency herein, attended to by their Tutors, as an essential Part of their Education, that every ill or aukward Habit may be early checked and broken, and the most easy and graceful ones promoted ; for which Purpose, they should be encouraged, when there is Opportunity, to attend such publick Speakers, who are most celebrated for the Accuracy of their Compositions, and the Pro-
priety

priety of their Elocution, without too strict a Restraint as to those Preachers, whose Sentiments may differ from their own; unless it be confessed, that Truth with the Prepossession of Education, and the Judgment and Authority of Friends, and Patrons, and Tutors in its Favour, needs still greater Advantages for its Support. And much Caution is to be used, not to adopt the Weaknesses and Imperfections of favourite popular Preachers, instead of or together with their Beauties and Excellencies.

3. Such Youth should be taught the strictest Self-Government, and the inuring themselves to hard Study, and other Difficulties; and should be made sensible, that their Profession will not (if the Duties of it are attended to as they ought to be) allow them the Avocations and Amusements of Men in Trade, and other Professions; and that to be a Minister of a common Rank, requires the Qualifications that would render a private Christian distinguished and eminent.

4. They should be taught to despise worldly Honour Profit and Applause, as what cannot be expected for Men of their Character; for which Reason they should prepare themselves for labouring with indefatigable Zeal and Diligence in the Discharge of their Trust,

under a Variety of Difficulties and Discouragements, that they may secure the final Approbation of their gracious Lord and Master, as the only certain and adequate Reward of their Services.

The Imperfections of the foregoing Address are many, and of the Writer of it more; but in this I have Confidence towards GOD, that the Motive to the making it, was an unfeigned Desire of serving the Interest of pure and undefiled Religion; which I hope will be a sufficient Apology for

Reverend Gentlemen,

Your most faithful Monitor,

and Friend.

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